

NAMES AND ATTRIBUTES OF GOD FROM AN ISLAMIC POINT OF VIEW

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ABSTRACT:

In this paper, various attributes of Allah are discussed from the perspective of Quranic guidance. Views of those who deny existence of God or incorrectly interpret nature of Allah's attributes are discussed and critically analysed through rational evidence.

INTRODUCTION:

"We will show them Our signs in the horizons (furthest heavens or universe) and within themselves until it becomes clear to them that it is the truth. But is it not sufficient concerning your Lord that He is, over all things, a Witness? " [1]

The above verse can be divided in three parts:

1. Showing signs in the furthest heavens (universe)
2. Showing signs within their own selves
3. Allah is witness to all you do The showing of signs is used as a proof of the truth about Allah's existence and of Him being one.

Ibn Taymiyah has said that three are the key arguments which are used to proof the existence of God:

1. Verses that deal with natural phenomena
2. Argument from fitrah (innate human nature)
3. Kalam Cosmological argument

In this paper the first two arguments will be considered.

1. VERSES THAT DEAL WITH NATURAL PHENOMENA

And have you seen that [seed] which you sow?

Is it you who makes it grow, or are We the grower? [2]

And have you seen the water that you drink?

Is it you who brought it down from the clouds,

or is it We who bring it down? [3]

Allah is questioning the unbelievers in verses [63-64] and [68-69] (of chapter 56) with respect to seed and water. Does man have any control in these processes? The conclusion drawn from these ayahs are

1. The inability of man to grow seed and bring down water from the sky

2. The ability of Allah alone to cause seed to grow or to bring water from sky So the ayah indicates Allah's sole ability in doing things which according to Ibn Taymiyyah is a sign pointing to the divine (Allah) directly.

Now there are also those people who even after witnessing such signs will not believe. Take for instance the story of Musa(as). He was given two signs:

1. The turning of his stick to snake
2. The light which came from his hand

The commentator Abdullah Yusuf Ali mentions in his commentary of verse 107 of chapter 7 (note no 1075):¹

"The serpent played a large part in Egyptian mythology. The great sun-god Ra won a great victory over the serpent Apophis, typifying the victory of light over darkness. Many of their gods and goddesses took the forms of snakes to impress their foes with terror. Moses's rod as a type of a serpent at once appealed to the Egyptian mentality. The contempt which the Egyptians had entertained in their minds before was converted into terror. Here was someone who could control the reptile which their great god Ra himself had such difficulty in overcoming!"

He goes on to explain in 1076 "But the second Sign displayed by Moses was even more puzzling to the Egyptians, Moses drew out his hand from the folds of the garments on his breast, and it was white and shining as with divine light! This was to counter any suggestions of evil, which the serpent might have created. This was no work of evil - of black magic, or a trick or illusion. His hand was transfigured with a light which no Egyptian sorcerers could produce.

In Islam the "white hand" of Moses has passed into a proverb, for a symbol of divine glory dazzling to the beholders." (Ali, 2000)

So from this, the denial of second type is countered.

If one has still got doubts after seeing the empirical evidences in ayahs presented above (about rain, seed and water), then Allah's signs in universe are plenty to observe and believe.

Sheik Jafar Idris mentions in his paper (Idris, 2012b):

"The final step towards rejecting God's existence was taken by Kant who said the laws of causation cannot be applied to anything outside our experience".

In his other paper (Idris, 2012a), he mentions that "the atheists considered the matter to be eternal. Their dream came to shatters when it was proven that universe had a beginning (according to big bang theory)" which Allah mentions in Al Quran[4]:

"Do not the unbelievers see that the heavens and the earth were joined together as one unit (monoblock or initial singularity) before we clove asunder"

From this verse, just like how the negative idea of the snake was proven wrong by the white hand; any negative ideas about God's existence will be proven wrong. Science agrees to this conception of the

¹ "Then (Moses) threw his rod, and behold! it was a serpent, plain (for all to see)!" (Quran 7:107)

beginning of the universe which it found out only recently, whereas Quran mentioned it 1400 years ago. This very clearly goes in line with the verse:

"We shall show to them our signs in the furthest horizons"

2. SHOWING SIGNS WITHIN THEIR OWN-SELVES:

The concept of fitrah is discussed in this section. Prophet Muhammed صلى الله عليه وسلم is quoted to have said in an authentic saheeh hadeeth:

"Every child is born in a state of fitrah (the natural state of man, i.e., Islam), then his parents make him into a Jew or a Christian or a Magian." (Agreed upon).

Dr Jafar Idris said in his paper (Idris, 2013): "Born with a natural capacity to be aware of the fact they are the servants of God, the sole creator, who alone needs to be worshiped" If people do not recognize by this way, their creator, Allah, then says "also within thier ownelves" - meaning people will undergo personal experiences from which they recognize their creator.

Consider the case with Umar (R.A.). It has been reported that he once came to Kaaba for Tawaf at night and found prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم reciting the Quran. The words appealed to him but he was struck by a negative thought according to which these were the words of a soothsayer magician. Then the prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم recited the verses which said this is neither the word of soothsayer nor a magician. He was astonished by the fact that very thought which occurred in his mind, the Quran gave its reply immediately. Then he wondered what this will be all about. It was said that this is the word of an honoured messenger. Every human being goes through various stages in his life till the message becomes clear that Allah is one.

3. ALLAH IS WITNESS TO ALL THAT YOU DO

Allah being witness is one of the attribute of God which according to Dr Jafar Idris is a greatest proof he existence of divine. No philosopher or scientist or any religious book can explain God's attributes in the way God does himself in Quran or what the prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم explained through the blessed Sunnah. Through this explanation of Allah's attributes, one knows who Allah is. Him being the loving creator can be felt from the sweetness of his attribute, AlWadood. Him being most merciful can be known through his attributes, ArRahman (merciful) and Ar-Rahmeen (most merciful). How can God's attributes be known: Dr. Jafar Idris further goes on to explain in his paper (Idris, 2012b)

"The attributes can be known through two sources

- i. Reason
- ii. Revelation

i. Through reason the following attributes can be known:

- If He creates then he is the creator and his nature is different from His creation
- He is uncreated or uncaused or eternal (no beginning) whereas His creation is created (has a beginning)
- He is all powerful because there are 10 to power 80 atoms in the universe. To create and separate each one of them, one will need tremendous amount of energy. He created the universe based on His choice so He must have a will.

- He must be all knowing for in order to create, He must be knowing - He must be self-sufficient for He is not dependant on anything to create
- What logically implies He must have no end ii. Through revelation, most of His attributes are made known to us, e.g. hearing, seeing, loving, being most merciful, guide to the straight path and other attributes.

Three schools of thought about interpretation of God's attributes:

Three school of thought have existed when it comes to interpretation of God's attributes

- i. Anthropomorphists
- ii. Negators
- iii. Affirmers

i. The anthropomorphists are those who liken God to his creation. They do the humanistic interpretation of attributes. They say God's seeing is similar to our seeing, His hearing is similar to our hearing etc. They fail to understand the fact which Allah mentions in the verse

"There is nothing like him".

Based on this verse, any humanisation of God's attributes is countered.²

They are condemned as polytheists.

ii. Negators are those who based on the verse "there is nothing like him" negate the attributes which Allah which He Himself has mentioned about Him. Some go so far that they start comparing him to non-existents when asked with a question "Does God exist". They say by saying He exists you are comparing him to existents. Nothing can be said about him in a positive or negative. The fact of the matter is that God is a living existent who like all existents. He has His attributes of seeing, hearing etc. A particular set of attributes when applied to the creator, takes a different tone as compared to when this is applied to human beings.

It can be understood more clearly with an analogy. An attribute (e.g. swimming, breathing etc.) applied to humans is different from when the same attribute is applied to other beings such as fishes or animals. Same way attributes like hearing, seeing, loving etc. can take place in a different way when applied to God as compared to when they are applied to human being.

iii. Affirmers are those who affirm what God has affirmed about himself in the Quran or what the prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said about Him in the Sunnah. First step is to affirm and then believe that there is nothing like him. By doing so, the extremist position of above two schools of thought is avoided. This is the understanding of the salaf and the first three generations.

Some negators would say that the words in revelations are used in their metaphorical and not in their real sense. For example, when it is said in the Qur'an of God that He sees or hears, what is meant is that He knows, because seeing and hearing in their real senses apply to animals only. This leads us to a milder version of negationism.

² Examples of this belief can be seen in many deviant sects and religions where God is considered to be in the form of human beings or animals. Followers of such concept personify God with human traits such as eating, marrying or having a child.

Propounders of this milder version are ready to attribute to God things like existence, knowledge, life, power, will, seeing and hearing in their real sense, but would take as metaphorical attributes such as love, pleasure, anger and hate. Next paragraph explains the belief of such negators.

There are sects who affirm only 7 or 8 names of Allah. This comes under minor forms of negation. Ibn Taymiyah in his book 'Aqeedah Tadmuriya' (Ibn Taymiyyah, 2000) criticizes that just like they affirm 7 or 8 attributes and then say that there is nothing like him, the same can be said about God's other attributes".

REFERENCES:

[1] Al-Quran ch 41 verse no 33

[2] Al-Quran ch 56 verse no[63-64]

[3] Al-Quran ch 56 verse no[68-69]

[4] Al Quran Ch 21 verse no 30

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